

A Blast from the Past

Vintage Japanese auto show drives old-school memories

The place was the waterfront in San Leandro, California. The occasion was a road trip back in time. The reason was made in Japan.

On a sunny day earlier this year, the Shokuji J-Tin Auto Show transported about 1,400 people back to the early days of Japanese imports. Hosted by the Historic Japanese Car Gathering, the event showcased 208 classic Japanese vehicles, each fully equipped with a tale from a different era.

Back in the day, Nissan sold vehicles in the United States under the Datsun name. And on this day, Datsuns ruled the road in vintage splendor. The Datsuns on display ran the gamut of models and conditions. There were humble restorations in progress, workaday wagons, economic hatchbacks, and light trucks, along with sporty roadsters and a fleet of Zs.

Travel back with us to take a look at some of the vehicles that set Nissan on the road to success in America.

Kings of the Roadsters

A group of Datsun roadsters, tops off and hoods up, seemed eager for sun and good times. One license plate summed up the mood of the cars and owners: "DATSFUN."



DATSFUN is a red 1968 2000 Roadster. Todd Osborn bought the car 39 years ago. "There was a teacher in my high school who had one. I was in the auto shop class, so I serviced it a lot and got to test-drive it. Back in the '70s during the gas crisis, Datsuns were popular and got good mileage, especially compared to the muscle cars," Todd said. Sold on roadsters, he bought one and hit the road as a lifelong enthusiast.



This racing-themed 1969 1600 Roadster belongs to Eric Gillis. "I got tired of just blue, so I added the orange stripe," he said (allowing that he'd gained inspiration from a Hot Wheels toy car).

But why stop at a stripe? Eric's roadster also has a windmill scene from Solvang, California, painted on the inside passenger door and Mt. Shasta painted on the inside driver's door. The artistic flourishes have made the car unique — and award-winning. Mike's car won first place in the "Goofy Award" category at a 24 Hours of LeMons, the low-budget "lemons" race event that parodies the 24 Hours of Le Mans.



What's better than owning a 1966 1600 Datsun Roadster? Bringing it back to life from a fate of scrap. Mark Nakashima found this turquoise treasure languishing in a junkyard. He bought it for \$300 and painstakingly began reviving it.

Mark joked (with underlying truth) that it took him "six years and three cars" to restore the roadster to yesteryear's perfection. One thing he appreciates is that Nissan continues to support the Datsun community by making parts available. "Nissan is good about that. You can still buy parts for a 50-year-old car."

All in the Family

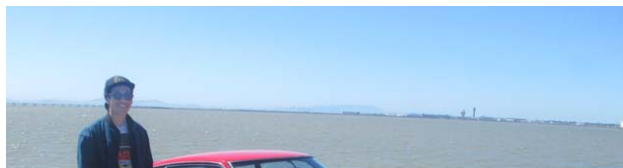
In the same way that today's Nissans generate loyalty from one generation to the next, so do Datsuns. The Dockery family has three Datsun devotees: Tom and his sons Matt and Nick. Tom's 1971 510 sedan was in the shop, but Matt's 1972 510 wagon was on hand for the day.

Matt purchased his blue 510 before he had his driver's license. Not being able to drive wasn't exactly a problem, however, because the car wasn't driveable. Matt and his father got the car running, spruced it up, Matt got his license, and now Matt and the car are getting in gear to head to college.

All of the tinkering and 60-horsepower fun made younger brother Nick an enthusiast too. "I fell in love with Datsuns — even though Matt won't let me drive his," Nick laughed. He finds himself in the same pre-license predicament that his brother faced. But that hasn't dampened his determination to find a Datsun now and fix it up.



Pictured left to right are Matt, Tom, and Nick Dockery.



Ahhhh to Z

No gathering of Datsuns would be complete without the iconic Z cars, and the show had plenty.

Jonathon Tong's 240Z was the oldest Z in the show and the car he drives every day.

Jonathon Tong's red 1970 240Z was the earliest Z car at the show. In the spirit of excellence, he "redid everything" after buying it a year ago,

from the engine to the vehicle interior. Today, the car is both a piece of history and Jonathon's everyday drive.

When Leon Vinokurov became the proud owner of this 1974 260Z, "it was a mess. It wouldn't start with a key, none of the instruments worked – it was a train wreck," he said.

The vehicle had been used in an auto shop class at a high school, and the hands-on learning had taken its toll. But Leon was undaunted, having restored cars before. "It's an addiction," he laughed.



Leon Vinokurov restored this 260Z, but it still bears the signatures of the shop class that preceded him.

Leon particularly likes the car because of its rarity. "1974 was the only model year that 260Z was sold in the United States. It's the rarest of the Zs; I like it because it's quirky." Adding to this particular vehicle's quirkiness are signatures that were left by some of the high school students (under a mat behind the seats). After three years of careful restoration, Leon opted to preserve the student scrawls as part of the car's colorful history.

The Sky's the Limit

Adding to the show's appeal were several Skylines. The Skyline was never sold in the United States, but the car takes its place among Nissan's (and Datsun's) most legendary vehicles. And its mystique has a uniquely **American angle**.

Reid Brown brought two Skylines to the show: a white 1971 Skyline and a red 1983 Skyline DR30. "I found the white '71 Skyline on Craigslist; a guy brought it in from Japan. I went and looked at it with my wife and said I'd think about it. My wife told me I was stupid and to give him a deposit," he laughed. He quickly met other enthusiasts, which ultimately led to his second Skyline purchase.



Reid Brown is the proud owner of two Skylines.

Back to the Future

Many of the day's enthusiasts pointed out that they aren't solely cruising in the past. They drive late model Nissans and Infinitis on a daily basis.

But the passion for Datsuns of bygone roads will continue to unite them in rallies and shows. Alvin Gogineni, the proud owner of Sora Blue 1967½ Datsun 2000 Roadster, summed it up simply: "They're fun cars and great people." 🇺🇸

Shokuji J-Tin Auto Show

The San Leandro auto show was hosted by the Historic Japanese Car Gathering, an organization founded by James Vorasane and Ivan Jaramillo. The two started the organization as a way to help showcase classic Japanese vehicles.

"As an organization, we want to help keep the car owners' passion for these cars alive. Because five or 10 years from now, these beautifully crafted cars might just disappear, and with them, memories," James said. "There are so many stories I hear from random people when I'm driving. People will stop and tell me how their parents used to have the same car and they would take road trips in it, or how they always wanted the car when they were younger. It often brings out a smile in people."

James and Ivan both own Datsuns, along with a sampling of primary competitors from the past. James owns a 1968 Datsun Roadster, a 1976 Toyota Corona, a 1976 Toyota Corolla and a 1979 Honda Civic. Ivan owns two 1970 Datsun 240Zs, a 1972 Skyline, a 1975 Skyline, and a 1965 Honda S600.

What does "Shokuji J-Tin" mean? "The theme behind our latest event was cars and food," James explained. "In Japanese, the word "shokuji" means meal. And J-Tin is what we classic Japanese car enthusiasts call our cars." In keeping with the show's theme, a group of food and refreshment vendors were on hand.

For more information on Historic Japanese Car Gathering, visit [Facebook.com/HistoricJapaneseCarGathering](https://www.facebook.com/HistoricJapaneseCarGathering).

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